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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- As the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) urges an end to all violence and restrictions on religious activity in China's Xinjiang Uighur [Muslim] Autonomous Region (XUAR).

Religious freedom conditions in the XUAR have deteriorated significantly since the ethnic violence of July 2009. The Chinese government has instituted sweeping security measures that include efforts to weaken religious adherence and stop "illegal religious gatherings" and "illegal religious activities." Restrictions on Uighur Muslim religious activities have caused deep resentment of Beijing's oversight of the XUAR.

"Launched in the name of stability and security, Beijing's campaigns of repression against Uighur Muslims include the targeting of peaceful private gatherings for religious study and devotion," said Katrina Lantos Swett, USCIRF Chair. "These abuses predictably have led to neither stability nor security, but rather instability and insecurity. Through its campaign of repression, the Chinese government has egregiously abused internationally recognized human rights, including the right of freedom of religion or belief. We urge the government to lift these restrictions, especially with the start of Ramadan."

In its 2013 [Annual Report](#) , USCIRF chronicled religious freedom abuses that have resulted from Beijing's policies in the XUAR. Professors, university students, and government employees have been prohibited from observing Ramadan and engaging in daily religious activities such as reciting prayers, distributing religious materials, and wearing head coverings. Minors under the age of 18 continue to be denied access to some mosques and religious education.

During the past year, Chinese police and security forces have initiated raids against “illegal religious schools” in the city of Hotan during which over 60 people were arrested, 17 children injured, and one child died while in police custody. In the city of Kashgar, Uighur men were sentenced to between seven to 10 years on charges that included “harboring extremist religious thoughts” and holding “underground religious meetings.” In addition, over 30 people were killed during clashes between Uighur youth and police in Lukchun township (**Turpan Prefecture**) and **Hotan**.
As many as 18 Uighurs recently were given sentences from 15 days to 6 years for engaging in various “illegal religious activities.”

“China’s reliance on repression fuels resentment and increases the likelihood of the very extremism that China claims it seeks to quell. For the sake of security as well as religious freedom, China’s government should lift its restrictions on all peaceful religious activities, said Lantos Swett.”